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Dogs Help Young Readers At The Nottingham School



Photo by Marcella Peyre-Ferry
The READ program is bringing dogs into the Nottingham School library to listen

Reading is going to the dogs at the Nottingham School in Oxford, and that's the new thing. A new program has begun at the school, where children will get to show off their reading skills to a visiting dog. The dogs are a nonjudgmental audience, which encourages children to improve their reading skills.

As part of the program, called READ, which stands for Reading Education with a Dog, dogs and their handlers visit the school library to serve as reading companions for students who are struggling with the read-aloud process or just need a little confidence building in reading.

Librarian Kristina Johns initiated the project this year for the second-, third-grade students at the school.

"I researched it over the summer," Johns explained, noting that the school was very supportive and students are very excited about the program.

Three representatives from Keystone Pet-Enhanced Therapy Services (KPETS) and their dogs will visit the school once a week through the end of the school year for the program. Students who have been identified by their teachers for extra help each minute, one-on-one session with the dog and its handler, reading a book at their

The system allows 12 students to be a part of the program each week. There is a good selection of dog-related books, but other books are included as well. Once children have read 10 books, they will receive a new book to keep.

"I feel very good about (the program). It fits in with our reading focus," Johns said. "Boys and girls that get confidence from reading with the dog develop their reading skills."

KPETS is a nonprofit association of specially trained and registered teams and their pets who are committed to sharing the therapeutic benefits pets instinctively provide. In December, the organization held an assembly at the Nottingham School to discuss safety, as well as the role of therapy and guide dogs in our society.

Currently, KPETS serves over 50 facilities in Lancaster and neighboring counties. They make visits to nursing homes, hospice, at-risk teens, hospitals, group homes, churches, senior care and rehabilitation clinics as well as private in-home therapy. The unconditional love of pets is shared with people of all ages and from all walks of life.

The volunteers who bring their dogs to the READ program are happy to be part of it. Cindy Burnes already takes her standard poodle, Jean-Luc, to visit nursing home Harrison House in Christiana, and she enjoys the school program as well.

The new program is a perfect fit for Kathleen Meitz and her standard poodle who has now retired from agility training. "She (Chrissie) needed a job, and I use her in the program," Meitz smiled.

Not only do the children and handlers enjoy the program, but the dogs see it as well. Jenna Fitchett has seen her 11-year-old German Shorthaired Pointer, Sierra, much happier now that she has places to go and people to meet.

Johns believes that the program will be a good one for the students. "We're looking forward to seeing the benefits of the program," she said.

For more information on READ, interested readers may visit the Web site www.therapyanimals.org. Additional information on KPETS is available online at www.kpets.org or by calling 717-333-5738.

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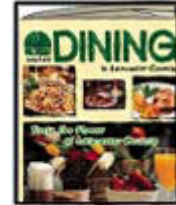
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